

LEONARD WILLIAM BLUMSTROM: LIFE AT THE NEVADA STATE ORPHAN'S HOME IN CARSON CITY, NEVADA, FROM 1913-1928

Interviewee: Leonard William Blumstrom

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Description

Leonard William Blumstrom is a retired Reno postal supervisor. Mr. Blumstrom was born in Utah in 1911. Shortly after his birth, his family moved to Tonopah, Nevada, where his father worked as a miner in the Tonopah Extension mine. An explosion in the mine killed Mr. Blumstrom's father. Mrs. Blumstrom was unable to adequately care for her four children, so the children were admitted to the state Orphan's Home in Carson City, Nevada, in 1913.

At the age of sixteen Mr. Blumstrom had to leave the Orphan's Home. He went to Reno to live and worked on the ranch of Tony Cassazza. From 1929 to 1935 Mr. Blumstrom worked at the Southern Pacific shops in Sparks and at Durham Tire and Service in Reno. In 1936 Mr. Blumstrom moved to Delliker, California to work for the Feather River Lumber Company. He moved back to Reno in 1938 and worked for the Reno post office until his retirement in 1970.

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An Oral History Conducted by Carol Marie Blumstrom

University of Nevada Oral History Program

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PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

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While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

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For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber
Director, UNOHP
July 2012

INTRODUCTION

Leonard William Blumstrom is a retired Reno postal supervisor. Shortly after being born in Utah Mr. Blumstrom's parents moved to Tonopah, Nevada where his father worked as a miner in the Tonopah Extension Mine. An explosion in the Tonopah mine killed Mr. Blumstrom's father. Mrs. Blumstrom was unable to adequately care for her four children so the children were admitted to the state Orphan's Home in Carson City, Nevada in 1913.

At the age of sixteen Mr. Blumstrom had to leave the Orphan's Home. He went to Reno to live and worked on the ranch of Tony Casazza. From 1929-1935 Mr. Blumstrom worked at the Southern Pacific shops in Sparks, Nevada and at Durham Tire and Service in Reno, Nevada. Mr. Blumstrom moved to Delliker, California in 1936 to work for the Feather River Lumber Company. In 1938 Mr. Blumstrom moved back to Reno, Nevada and worked for the Reno post office until his retirement in 1970.

All taping sessions were conducted in Mr. Blumstrom's home during January, 1981.

Mr. Blumstrom reviewed his oral history script which resulted in no changes in either language or substance.

Leonard William Blumstrom has assigned his literary rights in the oral history to the University of Nevada. and designated his memoir as open for research.

Carol Marie Blumstrom
University of Nevada, Reno
1981

LEONARD WILLIAM BLUMSTROM: LIFE AT THE NEVADA STATE ORPHAN'S HOME IN CARSON CITY, NEVADA, FROM 1913-1928

Carol Marie Blumstrom: I would like to find out about your background and your parents. First of all could you tell me their names and where they were born?

Leonard William Blumstrom: My father's name was William Leonard Blumstrom and my mother's name was Edna Nyman Blumstrom. I really don't know where they were born, but we were born in Tonopah, Nevada. I mean, I wasn't, my brother Edward was. My sisters were born in Utah - Signa and Esther.¹

Do you know why or have any idea why they came to the United States or came to the Tonopah area?

No, they probably came in the immigration quota to the United States from that country and they were miners. Most of them were miners.

So that is why he went to Tonopah, was for the work in the mines?

Yeh, they worked in Utah and then they went to Tonopah to work in the Tonopah Extension. During that time there was a great explosion, I guess about 1908 or 1909, and it killed, oh half a dozen or so miners. Among those miners killed was my father. My mother had no visible support to keep care of her kids so they was taken to the Orphan's Home in Carson City. I believe I was three years old, my sisters was five and seven, my brother was one or two. Then we stayed in the Orphan's Home until I was sixteen years old.

If you were admitted in 1913 it would be about 1928?

About 1928. They had passed a law in the legislature where they used to let them go out

1. The parents were born in Finland. The brother's name was Johannes Edwin but he was always called Edward John by his family. The sisters were born in Wisconsin and Leonard and Edward were born in Utah.

at eighteen years old. Then they passed a law where when a boy got sixteen years old he was released from the Orphan's Home. They released me and gave me five dollars, and then I bought a ticket on the V & T² and went to Carson City, I mean I went to Reno and got a job on a ranch.

When you were admitted in 1913 In the Orphan's Home, you and your brother and your two sisters, do you remember if there were a lot of children there or were there a few children?

At that time there were usually about eighty kids in the Orphan's Home and then later on it would vary between 111 to ninety.

Were all the children Caucasian, of white parents?

Yeh, at that time there was all Caucasian people. They didn't know what to do with Negroes or Chinese and I really don't really recall any Negro people in the Orphan's Home.

When you went into the Orphan's Home, the legislature classified children as full orphans, half orphans, or orphans with parents living. Do you remember how you were classified?

Well, I was classified a half orphan, and then my mother died in 1917 and then we was classified as full orphans.

Well then a half orphan is a child that has one living parent. Is that correct?

One living parent, and the parent that is alive either is out of' work or the mother is unable to support the children.

Do you remember who the superintendent and matron were at the time you were there?

Gosh, we had five of them.

Does the name Cowing sound familiar?

Cowing was one of the later ones.

Oh, so he was later on than Kendall and Clark?

Kendall and Clark, end I don't remember all of them but Cowing was a good men.

There was a superintendent of the home, and then what did the matron do?

The matron took care of the girls and the superintendent was in charge of the boys. The matron would help the girls learn to sew, wash laundry, and the superintendent would look after the whole Orphan's Home. Plus he had an assistant. Usually we had a cowboy. A tough old cowboy that made us toe the line. Then the superintendent had to make the reports, payrolls, and keep the Orphan's Home running in the black.

Do you remember when you went to the Orphan's Home what it looked like physically? What the building looked like?

Oh yeh. I know what the building looked like. It was a great three story stone building that was on a sort of a u-shape. On one side was a girl's section, which would be a top floor of the bedrooms. The second floor is for the recreation and studying, and the bottom floor was a laundry. The top floor on the boy's was bedrooms. The second floor was the dining room for all. The kids used to eat there. In

2. Virginia and Truckee Railroad.

the basement was the machinery, furnace, and coal bins.

So then the boys and girls were in the same building but in different wings?

Oh yes!

For sleeping areas?

They wouldn't let anyone comingle.

Did the kids have any type of privacy of any kind?

No. no. no. When they took a bath they was all in a big room. They had eight bath tubs and they just took and bathed them and whatnot. Sleeping quarters was all the same. Dressing was in lockers end there was no privacy. We just didn't pay attention to it.

Were there any other buildings on the grounds besides the home?

Oh yeh. There was the home and then in the back connecting to the home the boy's section was a playroom end a study room. It was all cement with lockers. In the bottom of that section of the boys was the bathrooms. So we would take a bath once a week with the larger boys scrubbing the younger boys and then the older boys taking care of themselves. Then every Saturday night there everyone took a bath.

Other than that type of building did you have any farm buildings or machinery buildings or anything else?

Oh yes. There was a gymnasium which the boy. would learn to play basketball, play hardball, and whatnot inside the gymnasium

when it was bad weather. We had a barn. I think we had eight or no, lets see, about twenty-four or thirty chickens, end we had about three or four horses, wagons, plows, and maybe a dozen pigs.

So then you had barns?

Barns, we had barns if or the cows, and barns for to keep the machinery in, and barns for the pigs and chickens, and also that gymnasium.

Will you tell me something more about the farm? What kind of equipment did you have?

Well, the farm was ten acres I would imagine. We raised wheat for the chickens and we raised alfalfa for the horses and cows. We raised potatoes for the use of the Orphan's Home. We had a big potato field. We had beets and we had carrots and lettuce and cabbage. All the kids from ten years on would have to do the weeding. The potato patch had great big weeds and we would take these weeds from the potato patch and reed them to the hogs. The hogs liked them and they crew real fat. The other boys would feed the cows, collect the eggs, and milk the cows. When the other boys that was milking the cows left, then somebody else had to take their place. Then we had farm equipment. I think we had four horses. We had plows mad we had disks and we had manure spreaders. The boy's boss would run the manure spreader and the kids would walk behind him and straighten everything out.

Did the Orphan's Home sell any of the produce or the cattle or the milk or alfalfa?

Oh the milk was used for the kids in the Orphan's Home and the eggs was used for

the Orphan's Home. There wasn't too many eggs. That's why we got them once a year. They would raise cows and they would sell the beef to the prison and they would sell some of the potatoes to the prison and they would sell vegetables to the prison in exchange for money.

So what did you have, just dairy cows or did you have meat?

They was just considered cows.

Did you do any slaughtering of the hogs or the pigs or cattle for food?

Oh yes. Yeh. They didn't slaughter the cows cause they needed the milk. If the cows went dry, they would trade it in for a young one and somebody else would kill it I guess. We had a slaughterhouse. We had maybe twenty pigs, I think about twenty pigs. They would have a butcher come in and then they would slaughter the pig and put the pig in this big scalding tub to soften the bristles on the pig's skin. Then all the boys, maybe four or five, would take knives and scrap off all the hair off the pig and then the butcher would hang it up and then cut the pig into meat for the Orphan's Home or to sell to the prison.

In the legislative council I noticed that when they did the accounting for the legislature the prison and the Orphan's Home is included in the same account for how many cows, how many bulls, and how much alfalfa was produced. Did the prisoners work with you on this farm?

Oh no, no. No, no.

Do you know why it was included?

Nope. Yeh, because they took and they sold the meat, potatoes, and other vegetables to the prison in return for services the prisoners used to do for the Orphan's Home. Maybe they used to repair the shoes down there.

The prisoners used to repair the shoes?

Yeh, I think that's where the shoes were repaired. By the prisoners in Carson City. They would repair the equipment that we couldn't do and that would be for exchange of potatoes. It was a good idea.

Did you have any reading facilities? Was there a library in the Orphan's Home?

Yeh there was in the front of the building. In the front of the building there was a recreation hall, the superintendent's office, the matron's office, and then in the big room where all the kids used to go in, they would have reading material. We could go in there any time we wanted and read.

Do you remember what the furniture looked like in the Orphan's Home?

Oh, the furniture was, no couches and whatnot. I don't remember.

What were the beds like? That the children slept in?

Regular, of that type, wooden beds with a mattress.

Like single beds?

Single beds, yes.

How was the home heated?

The home was heated with coal and oil. It was rather expensive to heat the home with oil and so they used both types of fuel, coal and oil.

Do you remember if there was any fire protection in the home at that time? Or was it a concern?

Yeh, there was concerns for the kids. They had an investigation there and then they put these extinguishers in various places and they also put out steel ladders on the end of the building for the boys and the girls to escape in case there was a fire.

Now in 1915 the legislature recommended that repairs should be done to the Orphan's Home because it was deteriorating rapidly and they said that instead of hiring labor from Carson or Reno it would benefit the boys in the home to do the labor on the buildings, the repairs. Now do you remember anything about that?

Yeh, that time you know, the boys could stay until they was eighteen years old and they was some rather large boys and they was rather handy. They didn't paint the outside of the buildings because it was too dangerous: but they painted calcimine in the bedrooms, and the dining room, and the girl's rooms. They repaired fences, they took and repaired all the sheds. The mechanical work for the replacement of the oil burner was done by professionals.

Do you remember about the kitchen at all? Were you ever able to go in the kitchen itself?

Oh yeh, yeh.

Can you tell me what it looked like?

Well, the kitchen was between the boys' dining room and the girl's playroom and it was a large kitchen. There was an oil burner stove probably ten feet long. They had a potato peeler and they had everything a kitchen of that type and at that time. They had a cook that did all the cooking.

Did she also do the shopping for the Home?

Yes, she did the shopping for the Home.

Did she have to go into Carson or did someone come to the Home?

They would order and then it would come down by wagon or by truck. A whole wagonload or a truckload of groceries.

Did you have three meals a day or two?

Yeh, three.

Do you remember the times of the meals?

Yeh, yeh. We would get up around six o'clock. Everybody would wash and dress and we would line up and march into the dining room; girls and boys both about six thirty. They allowed you, due to the limitation of time, they usually allowed you twenty minutes to eat. Then after that the boys had to clean the table and the girls had to wash the dishes.

Was this for each meal a day, twenty minutes?

Each meal was twenty minutes.

Well do you know why you were only allowed twenty minutes?

Cause they had all these kids to get ready for school, get ready for bed, and it was just a

matter if they allowed them a half hour they would ruin their schedule.

Do you remember what type of meal you got? Was it the same each day or did it vary? Did you have a good variety of food? Was it good?

Well, most, the reason I say it was good is because there was very few sickness in the Orphan's Home. We had usually mush in the mornings. We had our own cows so we had our own milk. We had a lot of vegetables, potatoes, and other vegetables during the other two meals and we only got eggs once a year. which is on Easter, and we had meat once a week. They couldn't afford to feed the kids meat three times a day or five times a week because they wouldn't be able to afford the expense.

Were you allowed to eat as much as you want?

No, they give you an amount. They just served you. They come around and served you and then that's what you got and ate.

So all the children lined up and sat down at the table and somebody came around with pots and put it on your plate?

Put it on your plate and that's what you had to eat.

Could you drink as much milk as you wanted? Or just one cup?

No, just one glass of milk.

Were you eating from crockery dishes or metal plates?

They used to use tin plates there because of so much breakage and then they didn't

think that was very good for the kids to use tin plates so they bought crockery plates and if there was breakage they would have to replace the plates.

Do you remember if the children were assigned duties?

Oh migosh yes!

Did it go according to age group or if you were a male or female?

Yeh, the duties there was by age group. The girls would have to do the laundry, and sewing and ironing on Saturday and they would have to do their own bedrooms and keep their bedrooms cleaned and mopped on Saturdays. The boys did the same thing. They would make up their own beds every day and on Saturday they would move everything and scrub the whole bedroom and also the dining room. Then the boys, about my age, I don't know, about ten or twelve, we would take and sweep up the cement portions of the Home, which was playgrounds. The bigger boys would milk the cows, feed the chickens, and slop the pigs. Also teed the horses. Then twice a week we would have to go out in the big potato garden we had and pull weeds which we would then feed them to the pigs. The girls of course just did all the sewing and all the ironing for all the kids in the Orphan's Home.

Did they do that all week or just on Saturdays?

Just on Saturdays.

What did the girls do during the week?

Went to school.

Oh, so during the week the boys and girls did not have chores?

Oh, every morning we had chores; the boys had chores every morning.

Well what were the chores?

Chores was feeding the pigs, Leading the chickens, milking the cows, feeding the horses, and then they would have to take the manure out of the barns, and then they would put it in a big pile, clean the hogs, and clean the chicken pens, and put it all in the manure pile. Then they would use that for fertilizer in the fall.

Then the girls didn't have chores during the week?

No, just normal chores like a kid would have in a home. He would have to make their beds, and make sure their clothes were sewn and shoes were shined.

Were older children responsible for the smaller children to be sure they were properly clothed?

Oh, yeh, yeh. The older girls and older boys was the overseers of the smaller kids. They had this, what you would call, well, he was the boss of the boys. He was usually a single man. The big boys would take care of the little boys and the overseer would take care of all of them. He made them toe the line.

So was he the one that meted out the discipline for the children?

Oh yes!

The superintendent and the matron didn't?

No, no, he was the boss.

Did he boss the girls too?

No, no. Just the boys. No, the matron, the wife of the superintendent, bossed the girls.

Do you remember anything about your clothing? Did the girls sew the clothing for the children or was it purchased by the Orphan's Home?

It was purchased by the Orphan's Home but the girls would do the ironing and the sewing when it was torn.

How much did you get in clothing? Did you get one or two pair of pants or shoes or what did you get?

Usually there was two pair of pants and two or three shirts.

What about shoes, socks?

Shoes, well, whenever you would wear your shoes out, you would get another pair; usually about two pairs a year.

Did they repair the shoes?

Yeh. We had a repair shop in the Orphan's Home that repaired all the shoes.

A shoemaker?

Yeh.

Was he from Carson? Did he actually have his shop there?

A shop right in the Orphan's Home. There was so many kids there that they

had to have a shoemaker to do all this repairing.

What did you have in the way of recreation.

Well, we had a lot of recreation. We had our chores to do and after the chores you had to go to school, and then after school you could play baseball, you could play basketball, you could play, oh kid's games like roll the hoop, then throwing the ball over the buildings, and chasing each other. Then we later had, when there was enough bigger boys, we had a football team, we had a baseball team, and a basketball team. We played some of the Reno teams. We played the Carson teams. In basketball we played Carson, we played Reno, we played, twice, we went to Tonopah where we played the Tonopah High School.

Mr. Ed Malley was on the Board of Directors of the Orphan's Home. He was a one-armed man. A nice, big, jovial man. He had two boys. He was a great sports-minded man and he saw that all the kids had, you know, was able to play all kinds of sports. So he liked basketball. See, he would take the kids, I was amongst them, on the basketball team. We made two trips to Tonopah. He had a Chandler Touring car and he usually would take two days to go to Tonopah and back. We would drive all day from Carson from early in the morning and get there in time for the basketball game. We'd play the basketball game, go to bed and get up, and drive the next day to Carson City there. He had two boys and both of them, one of them is still coaching at Santa Clara. There's a stream of, I think there is three boys, and when one boy would quit coaching Santa Clara the other one would take over. Even today there's a Malley that is a coach of Santa Clara.

Now when you competed against Carson, Tonopah, and Reno and these places, is it like today where they had tournaments and then you win the championship and then have a zone and state tournament? Or was it just for fun competition?

Just fun competition. There was no awards.

There was no awards?

There was no awards. There was just self-satisfaction.

So you competed in football and basketball?

And track.

And track?

Yeh, I won five ribbons in track on running. Football I played on the line and whatnot. Some of the older Reno teams was too big for us but we always give them a good run for their money. Basketball we did good.

Oh the other teams were older children?

Older children from Reno and Carson and they was bigger than we are but we still give them a good run for their money.

Did you also have a baseball team?

Oh yes. We had a baseball team. We played all kinds of teams around there, around that area.

Did any of these teams come to the Orphan's Home to play?

Yeh, they all come to the Orphan's Home. We didn't go outside to play. We played, they all come to the Orphan's Home to play. We played in a pasture land. We would set it up for the football field and then we had the baseball team in the backyard off the Home.

When the visiting team came did they stay for a meal?

No.

Did you have any refreshments for them?

No, just lemonade.

Just lemonade?

Yeh, lemonade there.

Did you have a swimming pool at the Orphan's Home?

Oh yes. The swimming pool there was enclosed and it was behind the girl's recreation area and was separated from the boys by a ten foot board fence and plus barbed wire on top. Then there was an indoor pool of cold water. The girls would swim on Saturday morning and the boys would swim on Saturday afternoon. They never comingled in the swimming pool.

Were you allowed swimming once a week then?

Once a week, yes.

Then was the pool used only in summer?

Yes only in summertime. It was all cold water.

Was it drained?

Drained at the end of the season and then they left it dry during the wintertime.

Did you have anything like radios that you were allowed to listen to?

No, no, I never did hear a radio.

While you were in the Orphan's Home what type of health facilities did they have?

Well they had a doctor from Carson City by the name of Donald Maclean and he was the Orphan's Home physician. When the kids got sick the kids would go to his office in Carson and he would take care of them. Later on they put an operating room and a doctors office in the Orphan's Home plus a pharmacy, a small pharmacy, where they could get the medicines rather than going to Carson City. He set broken bones, he had an appendicitis case, and treated smallpox and chickenpox and measles. The health of' the kids was real good.

Did he do anything with teeth or did a dentist come out?

No, they had a dentist in Carson City that would take care of the teeth.

Do you remember who the dentist was?

No I don't remember who the dentist was.

Were there any serious outbreaks of illnesses such as measles?

Oh yea, we had measles and we had influenza. One time during, I think it was

about 1917, when they had that terrible influenza epidemic, there was, oh eighty percent of the boys and the girls were in the sick room. I never did get the flu. I guess two or three of 'em must have died from it because it was a terrible disease.

Did you have Diphtheria? Or do you recollect it?

No I never had no sickness.

Do you recollect that diphtheria was in the Orphan's Home? That there was an epidemic at one time?

There might have been but I wouldn't know.

You were just too young to know what the diseases were?

Too young, yes, to remember. All I remember is measles and influenza.

But they did have an actual operating room?

Oh yeh, because the doctor says that rather than taking the boy or patient into his office in Carson City he would come to the Orphan's Home, operate on them, and then he wouldn't have to move him back and forth from the office to the Orphan's Home.

Now what about school? Did you attend school at the Orphan's Home?

No, they used to do it in the Orphan's Home but then they saw that they weren't getting very good results so then they made arrangements with the Carson City School District where they would take kids from the Orphan's Home for a certain amount of

money a year and we all went to the school in Carson City.

How did you go? Bus? Walk?

No, no, everybody would walk. It's about a mile away. We'd walk to the Carson City school and we would spend the day there and then we would walk back.

What did you learn in school? What classes did you have?

We had general curriculum. The boys, some of the boys, took manual training which was where the boys learned to be carpenters.

They offered trades for the boys?

Some trades for the boys.

What about the girls? Did they learn trades?

The girls learned sewing and cooking. There wasn't much training for girls of that time.

Besides carpentry what other trades did they teach the boys?

That's all they could teach them at that time in Carson City was carpentry work.

There was nothing like blacksmithing?

No, no, nothing like that.

Did any of these children go on to college?

Yeh, there was several. Chester Cochran went to college and become owner of Kitzmeyer's Drug Store. Alex Glock went to college and become a commissioner at

Douglas County. Harold Pilkington was there, I don't know if he went to college or not, but he become a mail carrier in the Reno Post Office. We had four or five that did real good. Oh Gordon Cook and Wilbur Cook. I think Wilbur Cook went to the university and become a mining engineer and I think he's still down in South America. Gordon Cook become a carpenter, a real good carpenter.

Were you ever allowed off of the Orphan's Home grounds other than for school?

Yeh, we would get permission from the boss and the kids could go down to the prison to visit the prisoners. The prisoners liked all the kids. Then we could go to Carson City and if we had a dime we could go to the movies. Then on Saturdays there was four or five of us that would caddy for the Carson City golfers. With that fifty cents we would either save it for two ten-cent shows, on each Saturday, or we would take the fifty cents and go to Choy Bucks, a Chinese restaurant, and order a Chinese meal. That would take our entire fifty cents but it was worth it. The rest of the time we would go scouting the fields. We had to be back by a certain time.

Did you have to have an older child with you?

No.

No? Did you just go on your own?

Two or three of us went together.

Did you have a curfew?

Oh yes. The curfew was as follows: the boys up to ten years old had to get ready for bed after they got through eating at six o'clock. They would go outside and tool around a little

bit and at eight o'clock they all had to go to bed. The boys older than ten would have to go to bed at nine o'clock. Then you get up at six o'clock in the morning. That was the way the everyday routine was.

Did you ever work off of the grounds? For pay?

We would caddy for eighteen holes usually about four or five hours and we would get fifty cents.

A lot of times my brother and I would, during Christmas, go up in the hills and get a big Christmas tree and bring it to one of the school teachers. We'd spend all day up there getting a Christmas tree and dragging it down maybe three or four miles and usually got a dollar for it. Well a dollar was a dollar.

There was a lot of miners in Virginia City and Silver City, etc. and a lot of the miners would come down to the Orphan's Home, oh maybe once a month. There might be half a dozen of them there plus some of the parents. They would bring a bunch of nickels, dimes, and quarters and all the boys, there would be about thirty-five, forty, or fifty of them all around them. They would take these coins out off their pockets and throw them in the air and let the boys scramble for it. Amongst them was a man by the name of Woods. He took great delight in visiting the kids and every Christmas he would give each kid a silver dollar. It was a lot of money and then the next day the bigger kids would have all the dollars cause they traded for them.

Well how did the older boys get the dollars away? What did they trade you?

Oh they would trade us maybe a glove, or maybe a shirt, and they would just make us toss for them to see who would get closest to the line. Eventually all the older kids had all the

dollars and we didn't have nothing. They didn't actually take it from us, they conned us out of it.

Tricked you?

Yeh.

Were they doing that all the time?

Every time you got a dollar. We got one dollar every year for three or four years before he died. When he died he had an estate of \$30,000. He give his nieces I think ten dollars and he left the rest of it for perpetual care of the bank. The kids would get the money on the interest and then all that money he got on the interest was taken and given to buy Christmas presents for the kids. Even today it is still going on.

His trust fund and the interest from the trust fund goes to the Orphan's Home?

Yes, and the \$30,000 stays as it is but all the interest is given to the Orphan's Home and it still goes on today.

Well is the trust fund for the Orphan's Home?

Just perpetual care.

Were the older boys mean to the smaller children?

No. There was some mean kids there. I had one mean kid on me. We called him Pongo but he was a mean kid and mean to everybody. Eventually they got wise to him and they took a strap to him and straightened him out.

The legislature mentioned that the Orphan's Home was set up to take care of children

who didn't have parents or children who had parents who couldn't afford to take care of them. Then there was some problems with delinquent children in the community of Carson and somehow these children were sent to the Orphan's Home and the legislature didn't like that. Do you remember if there were delinquent children sent there to have the Orphan's Home used as sort of a correction facility?

I remember a little bit of that because they got some kids, there was four or five of them, and they was larger and they would beat up on kids. Eventually the superintendent got wise to them and he appealed to the legislature and they either put them in the home in Elko or they took them out of the Orphan's Home because they didn't want them to disrupt the peacefulness of the Orphan's Home. It was a peaceful place to stay.

Was the home in Elko like it is today, like a reformatory?

I have no idea.

What happens if you were bad? What did they do to you?

They would take a strap to you.

What did they consider bad behavior? His mischievous things?

Mischievous things, end not paying attention, and being late. We'd bend over and they would swat you rood with a stick or a strap.

You told me that the children were punished for doing bad or mischievous things. Can you recall any mischievous things that you did or

maybe some of the other children that you were punished for, or maybe you weren't even caught?

Well, you know, a kid of' that age, twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old, they was always open for a challenge or a dare by some other kid. The Orphan's Home was a three-story building. It must have been, oh maybe fifty feet high, I assume. Then around the roof of the building there was a gutter. The gutter was about a foot wide to carry the rain and the snow. Somebody got the bright idea that they would go up there. They went up through the attic and they walked all around the building and crossed over the section of the playroom and walked over that. Then the first thing you knew they had a half dozen kids up there running around the building until the superintendent caught us and we all got strappings.

We was coming home from the Carson School and it was about five o'clock at night. It was getting dark at that time. The Chinese had a colony, oh about one-quarter mile away from the Orphan's Home where some of the state buildings are now located. One of the Chinese was sick and he died that day. There was four of us that went into his cabin and we took two guns, some of the Chinese money, and some of his trinkets he had inside of his cabin. We took them home and when we got them home and showed the older boys they browbeat us to the devil and we had to take them back and put them in the Chinese man's cabin. We could have gotten sent to Elko Reform School for doing that.

We would go down to see the Chinese people on Saturdays and also when they would shoot firecrackers. which would be about three or four times a month. The Chinese were very secretive. They didn't pay much attention to us but we would still watch

them do what they was doing. We didn't molest them much.

We did another thing that was dangerous. From the Carson School going under Carson City and coming out by the Orphan's Home was a wooden flume or ditch to carry water from the mountains near Carson. A lot of us kids, maybe four or five, would go through that flume from the Carson High School right to the Orphan's Home. We did that until they caught us and told us never to do it again because there could be flood waters coming down there and we couldn't escape. That was quite an adventure in itself!

Was the flume about a mile long?

Minimum of a mile long. It was about, oh about four feet square. It was out of timber. We walked right through there with mud and whatnot. To go right through the flume was a dare.

You mean you'd walk like there was a wood roof over the flume?

No, no! Under the street. You couldn't see it.

Well how did you walk on it?

No! Inside. We walked under the street.

Oh, you mean like a sewer system?

Yeh, like a sewer system but you couldn't see it from the street. It was all covered up.

But you'd be walking in the water?

Oh yeh! We walked right through there and we did it a half dozen times until they caught us. Of course we was punished. Our

privileges were taken away from us. On the whole there wasn't too many things that the kids did wrong.

Did you ever get to go into town and meet the children of Carson?

No, no, only through the school.

Was it easy to get along with the children or did they treat you differently because you were in the Orphan's Home?

Some of those kids treated us different there but the average kid in Carson City was good.

Is there any special way that you met those children?

No, just through the school, through the classrooms.

Every month there would be one or two boys who would leave the Orphan's Home and maybe three or four new boys or girls would come into the Orphan's Home. When they did they would set him up for a fight. Every time a new boy would come to the Orphan's Home you was selected according to the size of the kid coming in to fight him. He was only there one or two hours before he would have to fight.

Why?

To put him in his place. To show that he wasn't any bigger than anybody in the Orphan's Home. I was selected quite a few times and if I couldn't beat him someone else would take him over. That kid fought until someone licked him. Then any time that kid would get out or order the kid that beat him would put him in his place. It worked out real

good because they kept all fights down and cause if you have a kid that is going to beat you and tells you to do a certain thing you do it or he is going to wallop you. It worked out real good. The bigger and older boys were sometimes cruel to the smaller kids. They would make them do things and they would torment them. Five or six of us were tormented pretty bad until the superintendent got ahold or it end straightened those boys out.

How would they torment you? What would they make you do?

Oh my God! They'd make us do all their chores. If we didn't, they'd kick you in the fanny. They would hit you end they would make you cry. They wouldn't let you play games. You didn't want to talk about it but finally the superintendent noticed it end they straightened those kids out.

So no one ever tattled on anyone else?

No.

You just waited until the superintendent noticed something was wrong?

Waited until they noticed something was wrong. They took care of it that way. There was no after effects of the kid beating up on you.

How did they know? When they noticed it did they call the child in and say what's going on?

No. Then the man in charge of the boy would watch him. He would watch him, see what happened, then he'd go and get the kid and usually strap him and make him stay in order. So it straightened out.

Did you take any excursions?

Yeh. There was a man from Carson City, I don't know his name, and he had a touring car. He would take us up to Lake Tahoe once a year. He would take us up to Lake Tahoe once a year. He would try to take as many of the kids as he could on succeeding Sundays so we could spend the day at Glenbrook. Then he'd come back and next Sunday he'd take some more. Til eventually all the kids got to see Lake Tahoe.

Did any other people in Carson or Reno do that for the children?

No, no, just two or three individuals. I don't know what that man's name was but gee I would like to know what it was.

We used to have two horses and a wagon. If you did your chores good and you was a good kid, they would take about twelve or fifteen kids and put them in the wagon and start out early in the morning to go to Washoe Lake where the Orphan's Home had a boat. It was what you would call a scow. It would hold about ten boys. Then we'd go out to Washoe Lake at the south end and fish and spend all day just fooling around in Washoe Lake and bring home a few fish. Then we'd get in the wagon and go back to the Orphan's Home.

Did you ever go to Bowers Mansion?

Oh yes! Once a year, sometimes twice a year. we would take the train from Carson City. All the boys and girls would get on this train, about sixty or seventy of them, and then we would drive just opposite of the Bowers Mansion. There was a lane and so the train would stop there and then it was about a mile to Bowers Mansion. We would walk up the lane to Bowers Mansion

where we all got swimming suits. We all went swimming and then we had a picnic. They brought picnic lunches along and then we would spend the entire day at Bowers Mansion. Usually about four o'clock we'd walk down to the railroad track where the V & T would pick us up and take us back to Carson City. That was an outing the kids looked forward to.

How often did you do that?

Usually twice a year.

During the summer or spring?

During the summer. When it was hot and we could swim in the hot water pool and the cold water pool.

You spoke about the Chinese community. Did you ever go into the Indian community in Carson?

No. the Indian community in Carson was in Stewart. We played them in football, basketball, and baseball. We usually beat them.

Did you ever play any type of sports competition with the Pyramid Lake Paiutes?

No. We didn't know where Pyramid Lake was.

You had no idea?

No idea. All we knew was Carson City, Stewart, and Bowers Mansion.

What about Reno? Did you ever come into Reno?

No never did.

So you never saw Reno until you left Carson City?

When I was sixteen years old, the superintendent called me in and he said you are sixteen years old and the state law says that you have to leave the Orphan's Home. I had no parents and nobody to look after me so I was real frightened. They give me five dollars and I spent seventy cents of that to go from Carson City to Reno on the V & T. I got off at Reno. My sister Signa lived on Toano Street in Reno. She kept me for awhile and then she said I had to get a job. I got a job with Tony Casazza. His ranch was at Vassar Street, and it would include where the Sears Roebuck store is now and went all the way to Apple Street. It was, God I don't know, 600 or so acres. He had cows, horses, and he cut a lot of hay. I worked for Tony all summer long and in the fall. I helped him cut hay, used to run the mower. and pitch hay.

When you were in the Orphan's Home were you or any of the boys ever loaned to any of the ranchers in Reno or Carson areas to help out with haying or anything else?

Oh yes! The bigger boys always worked on the ranches around Carson. They worked for the summer, they helped pay part of their expenses, and they also saved money to go to college.

Sometimes people would come to the Orphan's Home and adopt kids. We was adopted by a Mrs. Bathhurst, all four of us. I guess we was about twelve, thirteen years old Andy my brother was two years younger than I was. She took us out to her place at Black Springs out by Stead Air Base. She had a dance hall out there, saloon, and whatnot, and a gas station. Also she had a garden patch of strawberries and potatoes that she

would raise. She was homesteading it. She had about 160 acres or more than that. We would pick the strawberries. One bad thing out there was rattlesnakes. Every time we would weed the strawberries we'd see one rattlesnake. We would kill fifteen to twenty rattlesnakes a year out there at Black Springs. She had three or four pigs and we would just feed the rattlesnakes to the pigs and they gobbled them up right now. We would run the gas station for Mrs. Bathhurst. We would help with washing the dishes that she had dirtied at her nightclub. It was quite a popular nightclub in Reno at that time called Hannah Bathhurst and the Black Springs Cafe. There was really big crowds there. Finally the Orphan's Home decided that it wasn't a fit place for us so they took us back to the Orphan's Home.

Did they decide that because it was a saloon or was there prostitution at Hannah Bathhursts?

I don't know. Could be. I don't know. It was not a fit place to raise kids, So they took us away. I enjoyed it out there. I had my own horse, we milked cows, and we'd run all over the hills in Black Springs. We'd get bummer lambs in the spring and raise them. It was an enjoyable part of my life.

She was good to you kids?

Good to us. Yes, really good to us.

Was it hard to adopt a child from the Orphan's Home?

Yeh it was hard. They didn't want to separate brothers and sisters. There was one kid named Victor something. He was a talented boy. He could draw and he could play a piano without having lessons. He was

a talented kid. This fellow come there. Victor had a brother and a sister but the fellow only wanted to take Victor. They let him do that. I don't know what happened to him but he was a very, very talented kid.

Were you aware of what the application was like to adopt a child?

I have no idea.

The main point was that they didn't want to separate families, is that right?

Yeh, yeh. They had to go before the board.

Before the Orphan's Board? The legislature appointed three board members for the Orphan's Home and they went before the board?

They went before the board and they approved or disapproved it.

Did you ever see the board members at the Orphan's Home?

Oh I know who they were but I don't remember noticing them, They never talked to the kids.

Did they come around and inspect the Home? Was the Home inspected occasionally? To make sure the health facilities, the food, and the living conditions were proper?

Oh, that was up to the superintendent to do it.

The superintendent inspected it himself?

Yeh, and he would make a report to the legislature on what was wrong, what work had

to be done, and it was up to them to furnish the money if they could to repair these items.

When you were at the Orphan's Home did any of the children form special friendships or if you had brothers and sisters did you mainly stick with your brothers and sisters and they were your friends? Or did you form friendships?

We had friendships but they didn't last too long because the kids were moving in and out all the time. We have some people in Reno and Sparks today that have been in the Orphan's Home. My sister Esther Blumstrom Codega Bergman, my sister Signa Blumstrom Codega Blouse, the Basso girls, there was three Basso girls, and Elizabeth Wagner and Belle Wagner. About two or three years ago we got together, there was about eight of us, we had a reunion at the Sparks Nugget. There was Alex Wilson and Walter C. Wilson. Walter Wilson eventually worked for the State of Nevada in some capacity.³ Alex Wilson became an RPO (Rail Postal Clerk) on the train. When I went to work for the Reno Post Office I would see him every night as he would come into the post office from his train route. We was both the same age and he retired in San Francisco.

When you were in the Orphan's Home did any of the parents that couldn't afford the children and put them in the Orphan's Home ever come back and get the children?

Oh yes! Yeh. The woman or the father would get a job, maybe remarry, then they would come out and get the kids. That was quite an effort to see those kids go out of there.

3. Budget Director under Governor Grant Sawyer.

Yes, I bet it was.

To get reunited with their parents.

Did the children usually stay long periods or did it vary?

It varied. Full orphans had to stay thirteen to sixteen years. Fifty percent of the half orphans left within the year. The ones that had both parents usually left in six months. It was until the person that put them in the Orphan's Home could get on their feet.

Did the parents come and visit the children?

Oh yes! Sunday was a visiting time. The kids looked forward to that. Of course we had nobody to visit us. They had the living room in the Orphan's Home where the kids and the parents would go to sit and talk. They would come every Sunday. When they could of course. Transportation was pretty bad because some lived in Lovelock and Tonopah and it was pretty hard to get there. So some from Tonopah and Lovelock would come once a month.

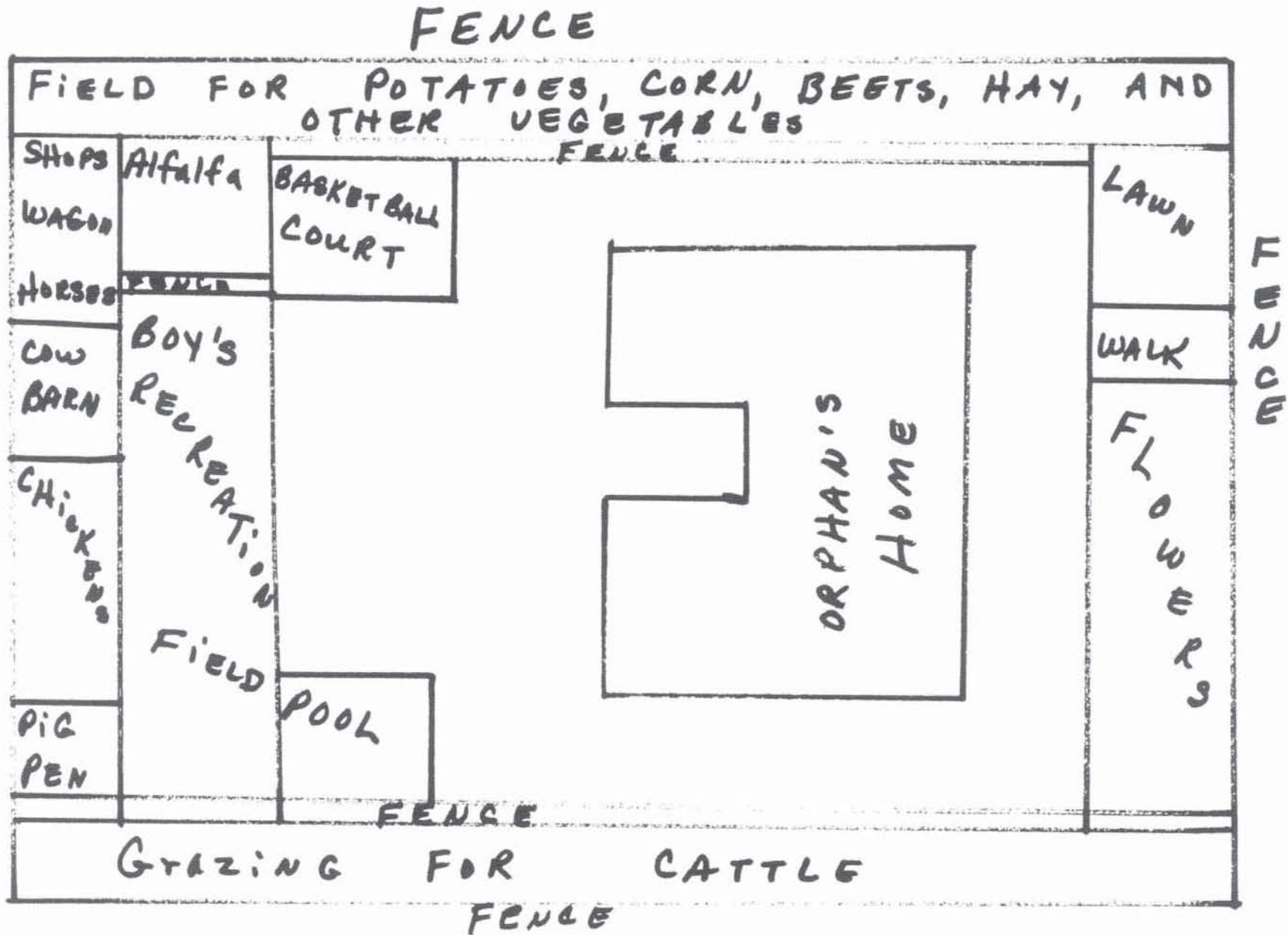
Did you have any ladies clubs in Carson or Reno that used to come out to the Orphan's Home to visit children that didn't have visitors or to just give little parties or do anything or that sort?

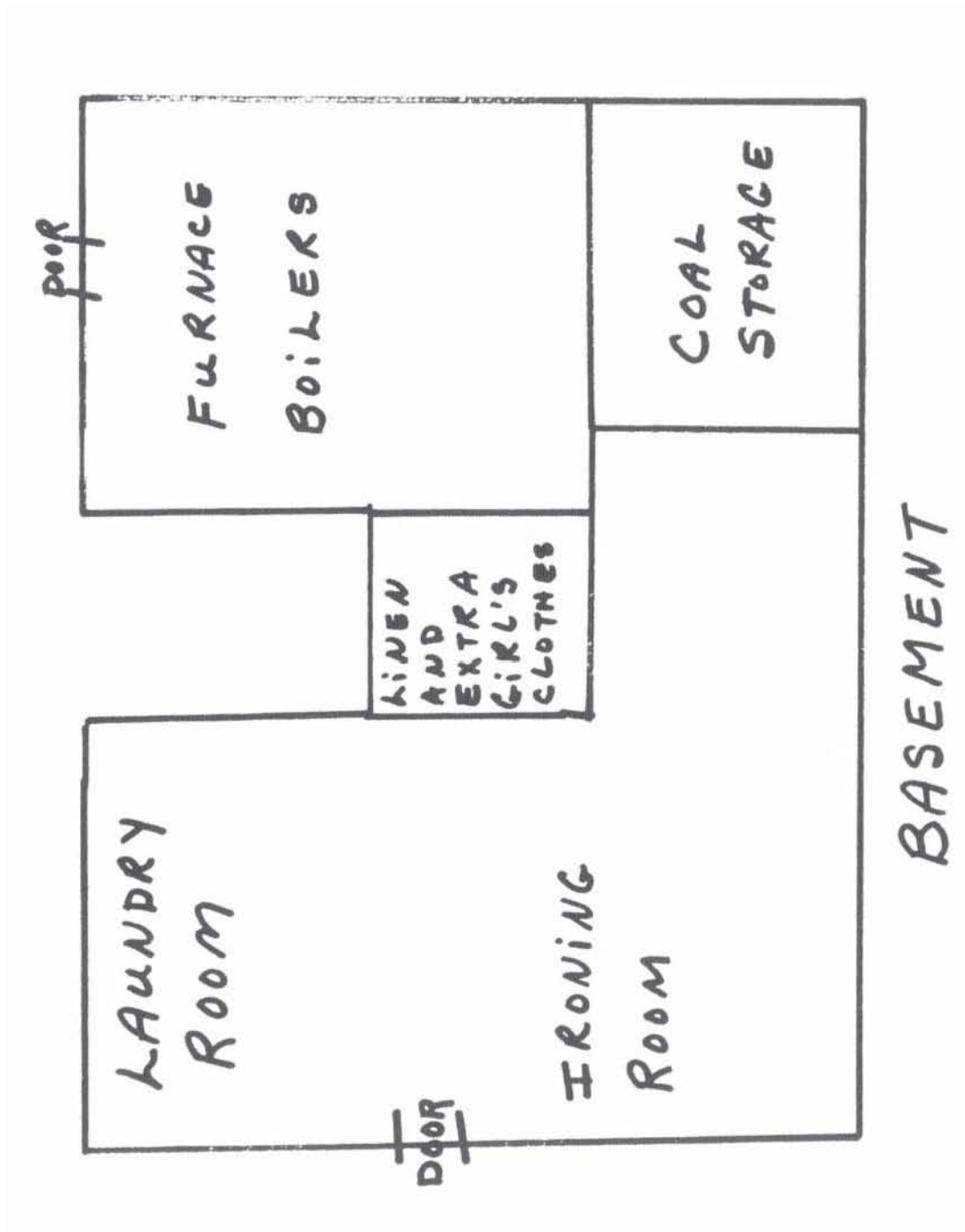
No. They might have done that with the girls. I don't remember. We used to have the miners. I told you that before. We looked forward to that. Other than that there wasn't many visitors. We was kind of forgotten.

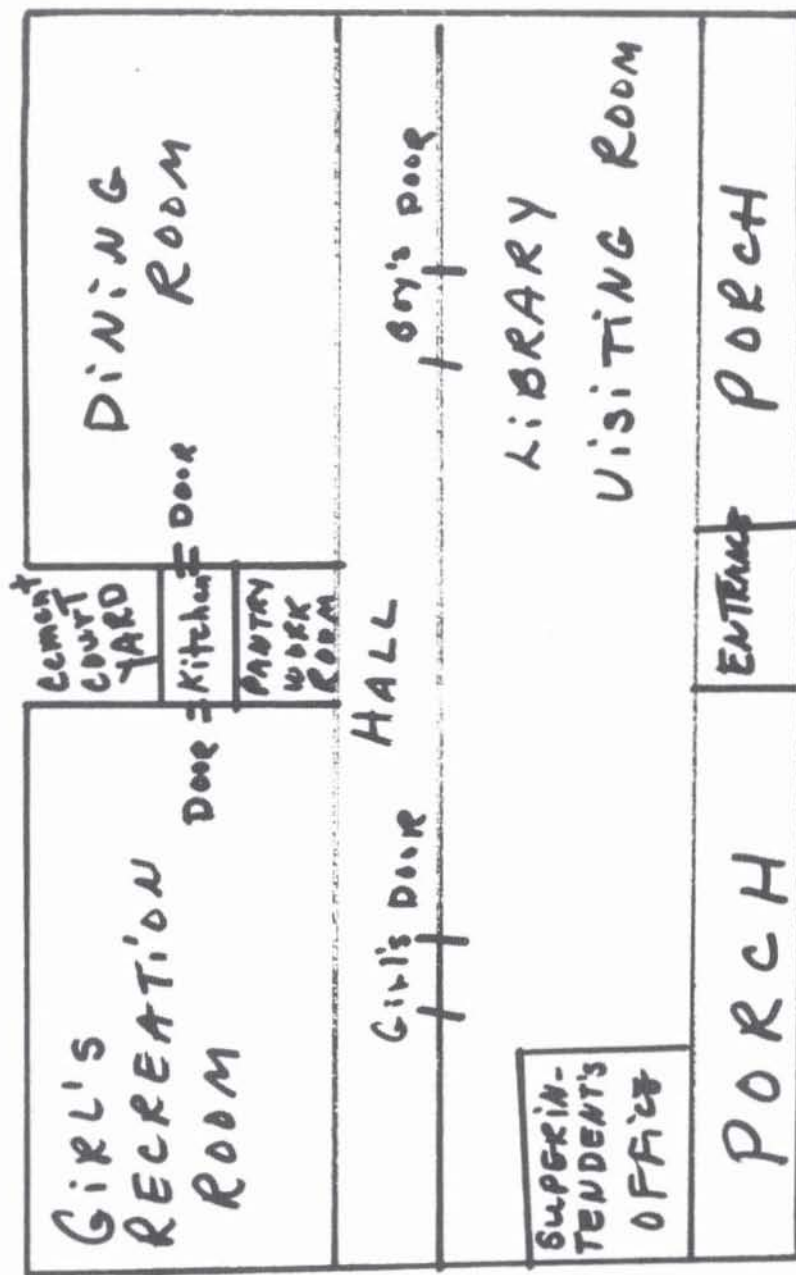
APPENDIX: FLOOR PLANS OF NEVADA STATE ORPHAN'S HOME

See next page.

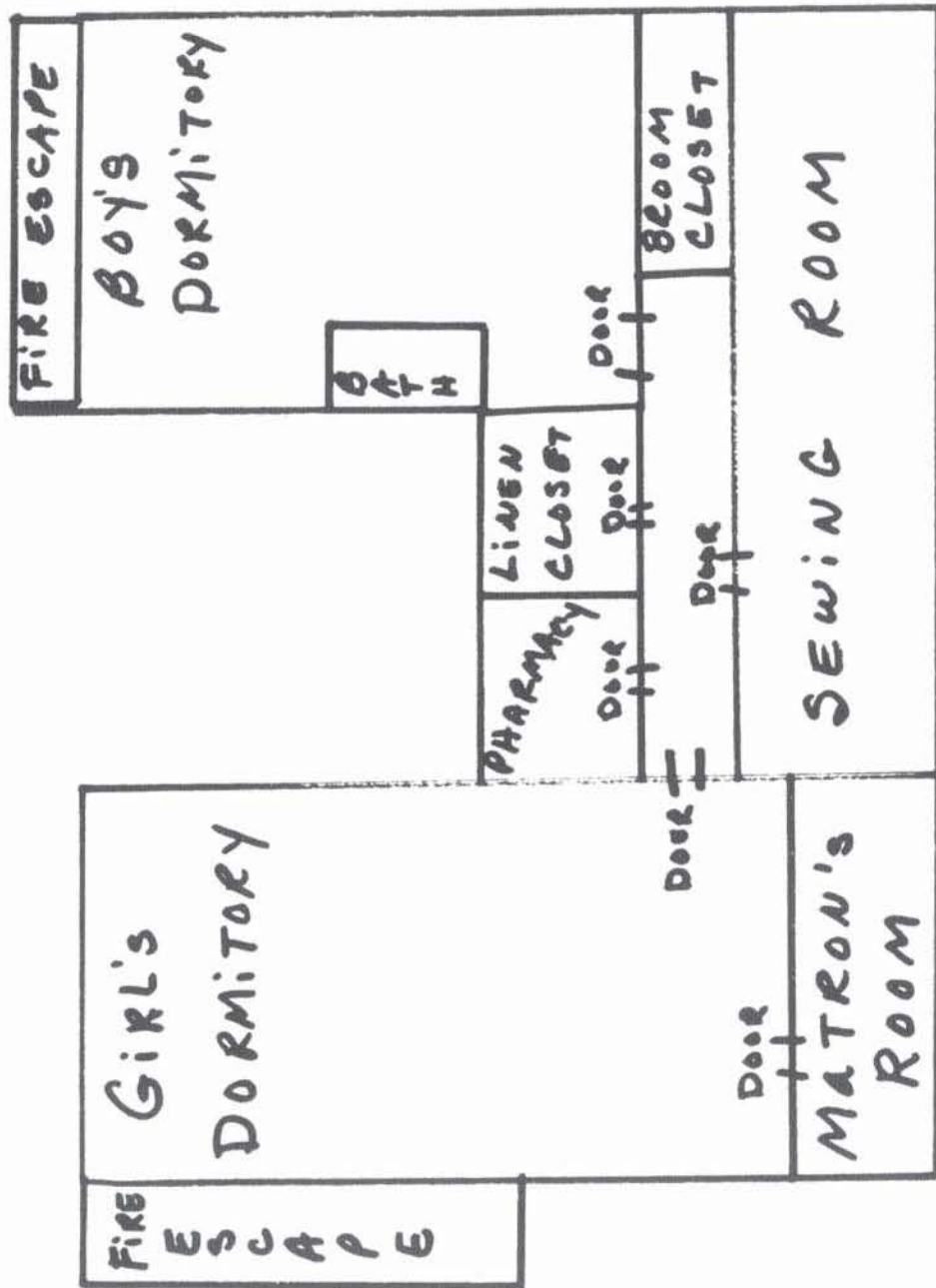
FENCE







SECOND FLOOR (MAIN FLOOR)



TOP FLOOR

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